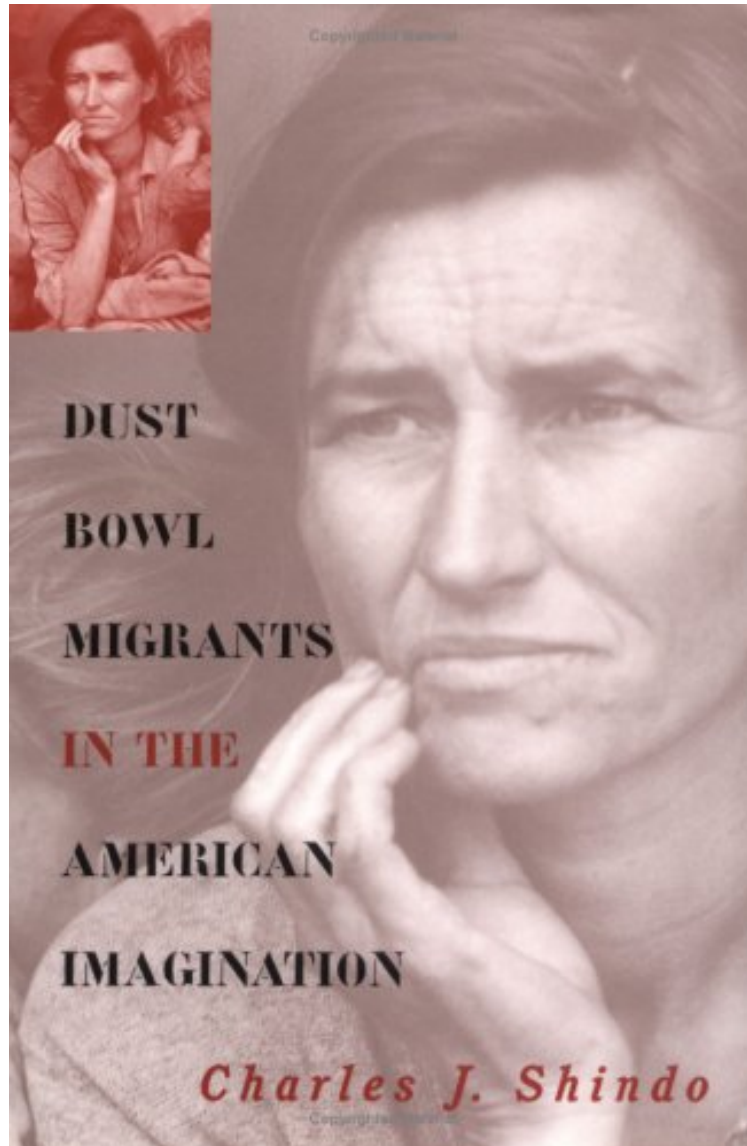


[Free] Dust Bowl Migrants in the American Imagination (Rural America)

Dust Bowl Migrants in the American Imagination (Rural America)

Charles J. Shindo

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Charles J. Shindo : Dust Bowl Migrants in the American Imagination (Rural America) before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Dust Bowl Migrants in the American Imagination (Rural America):

More than any other event of the 1930s, the migration of thousands of jobless and dispossessed Americans from the

Dust Bowl states to the "promised land" of California evokes the hardships and despair of the Great Depression. In this innovative new study, Charles Shindo shows how the public memory of that migration has been dominated not by academic historians but by a handful of artists and would-be reformers. Shindo examines the images of Dust Bowl migrants in photography, fiction, film, and song and marks off the various distances between these representations and the realities of migrant lives. He shows how photographer Dorothea Lange, novelist John Steinbeck, Hollywood filmmaker John Ford, and folksinger Woody Guthrie, as well as folklorists and government reformers, sympathized with the migrants' plight but also appropriated that experience to further their own aesthetic and ideological agendas. The haunted look of Lange's "Migrant Mother" and other photos, the powerful story of the Joad family in Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, Ford's poetic cinematic adaptation of that novel, and the gritty plainfolk lyrics of Guthrie's *Dust Bowl Ballads* have all combined to portray the migrants as the quintessential victims of the Great Depression. Shindo, however, contends that these artists failed to fully grasp the realities of "Okie" culture and seemed far more concerned with promoting views and agendas that the migrants themselves might have found inaccurate or unappealing. Shindo's study shows us how art can dominate history in the popular mind and illuminates the ways in which artists blend aesthetics and politics to make a personal statement about the human condition. His book not only increases our understanding of a tragic era in American history but also expands the scope of current histories of the American West to include cultural representations and their importance.

From Library Journal Our notions of the "Okies" who migrated to California during the 1930s Dust Bowl, according to historian Shindo (Louisiana State Univ.), have been shaped largely, and falsely, by Dorothea Lange's documentary photography, Woody Guthrie's music, and John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, later made into a film by John Ford. Each of these artists, he argues, used the Okie "victims" to advance a liberal agenda with small regard for their subjects' real concerns. Shindo's thesis derives in part from James Gregory's *American Exodus* (LJ 9/15/89), which is more balanced. One wonders, for example, in reading that Guthrie's "use of the office of folksinger aligned him with intellectuals and civil servants against the migrants," whether he is judging too harshly and whether, in fact, he has his own agenda. A provocative book, attractively illustrated with over 35 photographs, this remains optional for academic libraries. ?Robert F. Nardini, North Chichester, N.H. Copyright 1997 Reed Business Information, Inc. "Others have touched upon this vital and engaging topic. Now, thanks to this fine study, the full story of the dialogue between the American people and the most conspicuous victims of the Great Depression stands revealed in all its power and importance." Kevin Starr, author of *Endangered Dreams: The Great Depression in California* "No other single work provides such deft analysis of and fresh insight into the works of Lange, Steinbeck, Ford, and Guthrie in relation to the Dust Bowl migration. It is a significant contribution to our understanding of the migrant experience." R. Douglas Hurt, author of *The Dust Bowl: An Agricultural and Social History* "This is exciting work and a pleasure to read. This business of appropriation and victimization may raise some hackles, but it's right on the money." Thomas Isern, author of *Bull Threshers and Bindlestiffs: Harvesting and Threshing on the North American Plains* From the Back Cover More than any other event of the 1930s, the migration of thousands of jobless and dispossessed Americans from the Dust Bowl states to the "promised land" of California evokes the hardships and despair of the Great Depression. In this innovative new study, Charles Shindo shows how public memory of that migration has been dominated not by academic historians but by a handful of artists and reformers. Shindo examines the images of Dust Bowl migrants in photography, fiction, film, and song and marks off the various distances between these representations and the realities of migrant lives. He shows how photographer Dorothea Lange, novelist John Steinbeck, Hollywood filmmaker John Ford, and folksinger Woody Guthrie, as well as folklorists and government reformers, sympathized with the migrants' plight but also appropriated that experience to further their own aesthetic and ideological agendas. Lange's "Migrant Mother" and other photos, the powerful story of the Joad family in Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, Ford's poetic cinematic adaptation of that novel, and the gritty plainfolk lyrics of Guthrie's *Dust Bowl Ballads* have all combined to portray the migrants as down-and-out victims of the Great Depression. Shindo, however, contends that these artists failed to fully grasp the essence of "Okie" culture and were more concerned with promoting views and agendas that the migrants themselves might have found inaccurate or unappealing.